

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 523

IR 013 061

AUTHOR Manuel, Preethi
TITLE The Representation of Blacks on British Television Drama, 1984.
PUB DATE Jul 86
NOTE 65p.; Paper presented at the International Television Studies Conference (London, England, July 10-12, 1986). Document contains light, broken print.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audiences; *Blacks; Broadcast Industry; *Content Analysis; Cultural Pluralism; Foreign Countries; Interviews; Mass Media; Minority Groups; *Programing (Broadcast); Racial Bias; Realism; Social Influences; *Stereotypes; Surveys; *Television Research; Tokenism
IDENTIFIERS *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Since television both reflects and affects society, how blacks are portrayed in television drama is significant for program producers, the audience, and for consideration in debates on multicultural content, minority access, and integrated casting. Previous work in the field of blacks and television has been based on observational sociology, audience figures, or content analysis, and the processes of production have been largely ignored. This research combines the sociological and semiological methods of inquiry to provide a more dynamic and integrated analysis of the representations by making a critical study of the way in which blacks were portrayed in British television drama, a genre in which more conscious and deliberate decisions are made in regard to scripting, directing, casting, and production, than in news and entertainment programs. Content analyses were done on more than 600 randomly selected British programs. The appearances of blacks were analyzed in detail to define the kinds of roles portrayed, frequency of their appearances, and the recurrence of particular images. Two producers were also interviewed about black representation on drama, and an audience survey was done among black viewers in five British towns. The paper outlines the main findings of the research and makes connections with the social situation in Britain. (CGD)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED 294523

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PREETHI MANUEL

THE REPRESENTATION OF BLACKS
ON BRITISH TELEVISION DRAMA 1984

PAPER PRESENTED TO THE 1986 INTERNATIONAL TELEVISION STUDIES CONFERENCE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Richard Paterson

IR013061

I am grateful to the following people for their help and support of the project:

Mr D Bradshaw - Principal, DMIHE
Dr P Lavigneur - (DMIHE)
Dr T Kerry - DMIHE
Dr M Wober - Head of Research, IBA
Ms S Fazal - IBA
Mr P Eastaugh - PAS
Mr C Gilroy - RGM
Mr C Hanson - CH4
Mr M Waring - BBC

The project would not have begun had it not been for the encouragement of past tutors and colleagues and it would not have completed without the encouragement of family, friends and colleagues. Especially I wish to thank the following:

Mr B Dixon	Ms A Hill	
Mr I Lloyd	Ms D Sheldon	
Ms T Cheek	Ms C Fone	
Mr I Berry	Mr J Ramsden	
Mr B Coulston	Ms G Machin	
Ms S Roscilli	Mr C Mottershead	My parents

I am also grateful to the several people in broadcasting who dealt with my queries on programmes.

BLACKS ON BRITISH TELEVISION DRAMA 1984

- a research report

In Britain, the responsibility for national broadcasting is vested in 2 major organisations - the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) with two channels BBC1 and BBC2 and the IBA (Independent Broadcasting Authority) with responsibility for all 15 ITV (Independent Television) companies providing for the ITV channel and for Channel 4. Both the BBC and the IBA are bound by their charter to provide programmes which "inform, educate and entertain" and to exercise impartiality in the handling of news and current affairs. This somewhat 'nebulous' requirement is what the broadcasters claim to be doing - BBC1 from 1936, BBC2 from 1966 and ITV from 1955. Channel 4 is the comparatively new channel having begun in November 1982 and charged by Act of Parliament to provide a 'distinctive service'. Channel 4's introductory document states "Channel Four will portray Britain as the multi-racial society it is, encouraging different ethnic groups to speak to us, entertain us, tell us how they perceive the world we share." (Who are the 'us'?) But the nature of the tenure of the broadcasting institutions which is part public service BBC funded by television licenses and part commercial TV funded by Advertising Revenue After Levy is itself a balancing act as both BBC and commercial revenues

fluctuate with government and economic forces.

Whatever the nature of the broadcasting organisations, they each regard their role as making and broadcasting programmes. The BBC script unit states "in order to get off on the right foot, the first thing to be understood is that the BBC has only one job to do: to make and broadcast programmes. It is no part of the BBC's job to assist researchers or students..." (BBC TELEVISION DRAMA SCRIPT LIBRARY - NOTES FOR RESEARCHERS, STUDENTS, ETC. issued 1985) One wonders if there could be any other industry with public accountability that would be allowed to produce so much with so little concern for research and development. But programmes they do make for which the audience can purchase weekly time-tables - TV Times for the commercial stations and Radio Times for the BBC broadcasts, both in the top 12 magazines for press display advertising revenue (1982 figures from ADMAP Feb.1983).

This professionalism that broadcasters claim, their said commitment to 'objectivity' and notions of WHOSE objectivity are issues that need to be examined. In an authoritative study of news coverage, the Glasgow Media Group (Glasgow University Media Group ' Bad News' Routledge and Kegan Paul 1976) pointed out the myth of impartiality by extrapolating the media's bias towards the Conservative party and in portraying the trade unions as blame-worthy for social problems and strikes. In 1974,

Hartman & Husband published 'Racism in the Mass Media' showing the bias that exists in the media coverage of race and race-related issues. This was followed in 1978 by Stuart Hall's 'Policing the Crisis' (Hall, S. Crichton, C. & others 'Policing the Crisis - Mugging, the State, and Law and Order' MacMillan 1978). One of the key questions raised is that of public accountability especially from trade unions, minority groups, women, gays and people of disability, all of whom have felt that the media either did not reflect their work or lives or produced distorted ideas of themselves. No doubt the growing media awareness has played its own part in demanding of the broadcasters a right to participation and fairer representation.

My research began as a positive contribution to the continuing debate on black representation at a time when the Black Media Workers Association was campaigning for blacks to be included in the media, new Equal Opportunities posts were being set up in various public organisations, Race Awareness training was being introduced and theatre and television companies were being asked to consider integrated casting policies.

The research is based on the assumption that television does both reflect and affect society. Therefore the way in which blacks are portrayed on television drama is significant for both programme producers and the audience and for consideration in debates on multi-cultural content,

minority access and integrated casting. The ultimate concern is that of providing information in a field that has attracted considerable public enquiry but for which there is little critical evidence. Previous work in the field of blacks and television (not necessarily drama) has been based on observational sociology, audience figures or content analysis. The processes of production - from selecting scripts and casting to time-allocation have been largely ignored. Here I am attempting to redress some of this imbalance by combining the sociological and semiological methods of enquiry to provide a more dynamic and integrated analysis of the representations.

AIM: The aim of the research was to make a critical study of the way in which blacks were portrayed on British Television drama. The term 'blacks' was used, for the purposes of the research, to refer to people of visibly dark colour. I was aware of the limitations of this definition but it was purely a working definition and in my case, helped me to identify characters on television.

Drama was chosen for study because it is in drama, more than in news and entertainment programmes that conscious and deliberate decisions are made as regards scripting, directing, casting and production.

METHODOLOGY: With a study of this nature, one necessarily

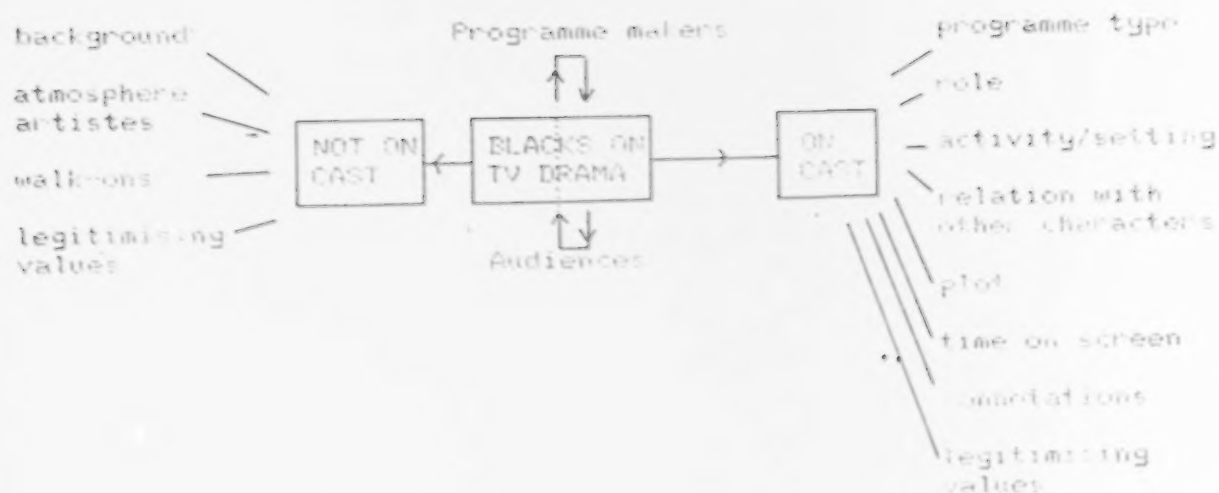
begins with monitoring programmes and content analysis, with the objective reality of what is broadcast. Towards this end, more than 600 programmes were randomly selected and recorded. Since American, Australian or non-British productions were excluded, the selection of 30-40 hours of drama a month did not involve an overwhelming choice. When blacks appeared in the cast, as walk-ons or in the background, their appearances were analysed in detail to define the kind of roles portrayed, the frequency of their appearances and the recurrence of particular images.

The critical framework was provided by both film and literary criticism and methods of observational sociology. The quantitative analysis was an useful starting point from which a qualitative study was made of the meanings associated with black characters, the degree and involvement of black characters with other characters in the drama and to deal with questions of how significantly the black characters affected the plot and structure. Programmes were monitored from January 1984 to December 1984. The reason for the year-long monitoring was to point to any particular trends in black representation.

It was envisaged that empirical and qualitative analysis would not adequately cover the COMMUNICATION PROCESS and in order to do that two producers were interviewed in relation to black representation on drama. During the beginning of 1985, an audience survey was carried out among black

viewers in 5 major towns in the UK to assess their responses to the question of black representation on television. The results from the survey are also outlined here although not in as much detail as the author would wish.

A diagram illustrating the multi-faceted approach in relation to black appearances would appear something like this:



APPEARANCES OF BLACKS ON TV DRAMA - the aspects considered

FUNDING: The project was funded jointly by the Doncaster Metropolitan Institute of Higher Education and the Independent Broadcasting Authority.

LIMITATIONS/CHALLENGES: One of the major limitations posed

was by the subject matter itself - television being an ephemeral medium demands an enquiry that is specifically its own. This system is in the process of being evolved with works as John Fiske and John Hartley's 'Reading Television' (Methuen 1978). The absence of a comprehensive system of enquiry into the different processes of television meant that frequently one had to construct a 'frame of reference' drawing from tv, film, literary and social criticism. This was a difficult task considering the fact that the subject matter had received a marginal academic treatment. What is more, methods of analysis in relation to television are constantly changing as technology and social values alter, hence traditional rules are often made redundant. In relation to black representation for example one can see this quite clearly in the move from the relative non-representation of blacks to the selective representation of blacks in roles with negative connotations.

Another area of limitation/challenge was in the process of selection all of which was carried out by one researcher. One of the thesis was to demonstrate the potential for important research on television for any media researcher with access to a video recorder thus circumventing the broadcasting institutions' reluctance to make scripts easily available for researchers. One may argue from the point of bias in selection and certainly I do feel that this criticism is valid if it is also taken into account

that: 1)the year-long monitoring was intended partly to counteract this and 2)the white male ethnocentric viewpoints have been accepted without question in the media for several years.

The area of denotative and ideological analysis is a particularly difficult area in dealing with the media and therefore I will not enter into the discussion of the issue at this stage. What I propose to do is to deal with the research in four separate sections and by doing so I do not wish to negate their inter-dependency:

SECTION I: REPRESENTATIONS - roles, meanings, settings, legitimising values, stereotypes, absence

SECTION II: MEDIA FORMS - forms, genres, connotations, signs, codes, realism, narrative, myths

SECTION III: MEDIA PROCESSES - programming, producer interviews

SECTION IV: AUDIENCES - survey of the black audience

SECTION V: CONCLUSIONS

SECTION I REPRESENTATIONS

It is important to recognise that television, whether dealing with news or fictional items, involves a careful process of selection and elimination. The 'reality' of the situation or of fictitious characters is not something that is 'out there' but something that is socially constructed. From the script writer to the editor, the programme producer, actor, camera person, director, etc. each person brings into a production situation a certain PRIORI of norms and of values, of what 'makes' television, of what 'works' with the audiences and what is in artistic interests. The viewpoints are therefore reflective of the people engaged in the process of production, each programme employing a selected 'body' of people. In a programme like 'Minder' broadcast in February 1984, the more obvious people involved were the 17 actors, the Producer and Director but there were also camerapersons, editors, sound mixers, wardrobe assistants and others making a total of more than 35 in the production, each of whom will have affected the programme to a lesser or greater extent.

What do we mean by representations? Hartley and others provide a working definition: "A vital part of the way in which the different media represent the social world is by means of REPRESENTATIONS which are constructed around and

articulated through REPRESENTATIVES - the people who, in a variety of ways, 'address us'." (HARTLEY J, GOULDEN H, & SULLIVAN, T 'Making Sense of the Media Unit III i')

The content analysis was the starting point to study the representations. A log sheet was used for every programme monitored giving details of production and a synopsis of the content. Overall, a total of 670 programmes were monitored, an average of 55 programmes a month. A breakdown for the number of programmes monitored each month is given below:

NO OF PROGRAMMES MONITORED EACH MONTH DURING 1984
(BBC1, BBC2, ITV and CH4 included)

JANUARY	53
FEBRUARY	51
MARCH	57
APRIL	36
MAY	53
JUNE	49
JULY	68
AUGUST	88
SEPTEMBER	67
OCTOBER	61
NOVEMBER	60
DECEMBER	27
TOTAL	670

This number is considerably more than previous monitoring

surveys. For example the CRE monitored one month's output during 1978/79 (Television in a Multi-racial Society, CRE 1982). From the information on the log sheets, the casting figures for black and white actors was arrived at which indicated at an empirical level, the extent of black participation. This was a more reliable method than recording all black appearances as walk-ons and non-speaking roles.

	WHITE ACTORS CAST	BLACK TOTAL	ACTORS ON MALE	CAST FEMALE
JAN	733	42	27	15
FEB	640	25	13	12
MAR	700	26	18	8
APR	503	14	12	2
MAY	711	7	5	2
JUN	690	5	2	3
JUL	847	8	7	1
AUG	1127	14	8	6
SEP	891	20	8	6
OCT	814	12	7	5
NOV	783	20	14	6
DEC	294	9	6	3
T O T A L	8733	202	73	129

The year total of 8733 actors on cast had 202 black actors. This meant that only 2.3% of actors on cast were black. Earlier research has also shown the low representation of

blacks. The BBC Audience Research in 1972 'Non-whites on British Television' for example in a monitoring study which included US originated programmes found 368 whites with speaking roles compared to 9 blacks i.e. 2.2% of the total

During the summer months of May-August, the percentage of blacks on cast is decreased. It is not clear as to why this is the case. General television viewing drops during the summer months but these cannot be explained as causal.

One can continue by an analysis of the representatives i.e. the people through whom the representations are made. What roles are assigned to the representatives? A month by month analysis of roles in which black actors were cast is given below. It is problematic defining characters purely by their roles, either expressed or understood, and therefore a more detailed account of significant types of representations will follow the monthly analysis. What is important is to look at the recurring pattern of roles which were assigned to black actors after what we know to be a formal process of programme consultation on the part of the producers.

To illustrate the wide variety of programmes recorded, a list of the first five programmes recorded during the month is listed below the monthly casting list. This list of programmes is by no means typical.

MONTH BY MONTH LIST OF ROLES IN WHICH BLACK ACTORS WERE
CAST:

JANUARY

GENIE OF THE RING
INDIAN TROOPS & ARISTOCRACY - several
INDIAN JOURNALIST & ELITE - several
COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL PUPILS
GARAGE WORKER
YOUTH AT HOME/ASIAN SHOPKEEPER
JOURNALIST, ORDERLY
WAITER
DANCER

Programmes monitored this month included: Aladdin and the
40 thieves(BBC1), Separate Tables(ITV), Far Pavilions(CH4),
Cockles(BBC1) and Dr Who (BBC1)

FEBRUARY

ACCOMPLICES IN TIPSTERS' ORGANISATION
INDIAN
YOUTH AT HOME
SEAMSTRESS

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL STUDENTS
 YOUTH DANCER
 TROOPER IN SCIENCE FICTION
 INDIAN ARISTOCRACY
 WEST INDIAN YOUTH
 CLIENT AT ADVICE CENTRE
 STUDENT
 YOUTH DANCER & PEACEMAKER

Programmes monitored this month include: Minder(ITV),
 Emmerdale Farm(ITV), Steam Video Company(ITV), Sharon &
 Elsie(BBC1) and Dream Stuffing(CH4).

MARCH

JOURNALIST
 COMEDIAN ..
 ESL STUDENTS
 NURSE
 GARAGE WORKER
 ORDERLY
 SECRETARY

Programmes monitored this month included: Diana(BBC1),
 Barriers(CH4), Killer Contract(ITV), The Avengers(CH4),
 Jewel in the Crown(CH4) and Danger-Marmalade(ITV).

APRIL

TRAIN DRIVER & DAUGHTERS

ELECTRICIAN

INDIAN ARMY OFFICER

TAP DANCERS

SECURITY GUARD

GARAGE WORKER

ROMAN

TRAIN WORKER

Programmes monitored this month included: The Irish RM(ITV), Kit Curran Radio Show(ITV), Charlie(ITV), King(BBC1), Charlie(ITV) and Country Diary(ITV).

MAY

STUDENT

GAY MAN

CHAUFFEUR

PRISONER

GARAGE WORKER

STRIP TEASE ARTIST

Programmes monitored this month included: Crossroads(ITV), Emmerdale Farm(ITV), Edwardian Lady(ITV), Coronation Street(ITV), Porridge(BBC1).

JUNE

SCHOOL PUPIL

PRISONER

FAN CLUB MEMBER

HOSPITAL SISTER

Programmes monitored this month included: Shine on Harvey Moon(ITV),Alfresco(ITV), Scully(CH4), Man About the House(CH4) and Take the High Road(ITV).

JULY

POLICE INFORMER

FAN CLUB BOY

LIBRARIAN AS ASSAULT WITNESS**

MUGGER

SCHOOL PUPIL

SCOTTISH FACTORY WORKER

Programmes monitored this month included: Upstairs Downstairs(CH4), Tenko(BBC2), Round and Round(BBC2), Brookside(CH4) and The Brief(ITV).

AUGUST

MILITANT, BLACK FREEDOM WORKER

COUNCIL TENANTS

WITNESS IN COURT

MAHARAJA

FRIEND OF WHITE YOUTH

GARAGE WORKER

FRIEND OF WHITE YOUTH

BOYFRIEND OF WHITE GIRL

AMERICAN PEACE CAMPAIGNER

PIMP, GIRLFRIEND

HEADMASTER, PUPIL

Programmes monitored this month included: Crossroads(ITV),
Coronation Street(ITV), Crossroads(ITV), Poor Little Rich
Girls(ITV), Solo(BBC1)

SEPTEMBER

POLICE INFORMER

SECRETARY

BUYER

SUSPECT VIDEO DEALER, COMMUNITY

COMEDIANS

HOTEL RECEPTIONIST, ROOM ATTENDANT

CHECK-OUT ASSISTANT

Programmes monitored this month included: Juliet
Bravo(BBC1), Gentle Touch(ITV), Upstairs Downstairs(CH4),
Dombey & Son(BBC1) and An Inspector Calls(BBC1).

OCTOBER

CHECK-OUT ASSISTANT

SECRETARY

MILKMAN

PUNTERS

CAREER DIPLOMAT

MODEL

OPHTHALMIST

SEAMSTRESS

NURSE

Programmes monitored this month included: Tripper's Day(ITV), Chance in a Million(CH4), Glory Boys(ITV), Invisible Man(BBC1) and Butterflies(BBC1).

NOVEMBER

SCHOOL PUPILS

NIGHT WATCHMAN

SHOPKEEPER

PUNTER

SHARING TENANT

ARMED ROBBER

FANCLUB BOY

RELIGIOUS LEADER

CLERK, ACCOUNTANT

AFRICAN PRESIDENT, FAMILY MEMBERS

ARMY MAN

10

Programmes monitored this month included: Grange Hill(BBC1), Don't Wait Up(BBC1), The Bounder(ITV), Halleluyah(ITV) and Mitch(ITV)

DECEMBER

PUNTER

MURDER VICTIM

SECURITY GUARD/RASTA & OTHERS

STUDENTS

Programmes monitored this month included: The Prisoner of Zenda(BBC1), Ever Decreasing Circles(BBC1), Big Deal(BBC1), To the Manor Born(BBC2) and New Statesman.

It is not difficult to see the pattern that emerges in relation to black representation, a predominance of roles depicting pupils, nurses and blacks as belonging to the 'working class' and there are some roles which appear to fall outside this pattern. It will be helpful to compare the above list with a list of casting for white actors. For January alone, this runs as follows:

ALADDIN AND MYTHICAL CHARACTERS, AGEING SUCCESSFUL MEN, RULING OFFICERS IN INDIA, HOLIDAYING MEN & WOMEN, SCIENCE FICTION CHARACTERS, DIVORCED MAN, PUBLIC SCHOOL CHILDREN, MIDDLE CLASS DIVORCED COUPLE, SINGLE MAN.....

Clearly, the casting of white actors reflects a diversity of class, background, age, setting and occupation that is absent in the case of blacks. A similar list of white actors on cast can be presented for the rest of the year. When the black roles operate within such "fixed mental

impressions" (Oxford Dictionary 1964), they can be said to constitute a "stereotype".

I have chosen to deal BRIEFLY with the dominant themes of black representation' under the following headings:

1. BLACKS AS VIOLENTS AND AGGRESSIVES
2. INDIANS - THE EXOTICA
3. THE BLACK PUPIL
4. THE BLACK SLAVE
5. THE ANTI-STEREOTYPE
6. THE UNDERWORLD OF BLACKS
7. THE ABSENCE

1. BLACKS AS VIOLENTS & AGGRESSIVES: Several roles for blacks were portrayed as violent, aggressive and subversive. In 'Annika', a drama about young love, Alan is cast as a friend of the main white character. In one episode where he is confronted by some fascists, he whips out a knife in threat. The knife he revealed later as a dummy but not before he had created a hostile environment. Although cast as a friend, Alan's role was ignored in the later episodes. In 'The Sweeney', the search for a criminal involved a chase after Rae, the 'pimp' who promptly wielded a knife. An armed raid on a bank in 'The Bill' involved a black raider with a gun. The police and detective series were particularly likely to cast blacks in violent roles. Resolving the conflict in the situation was often in terms of surrendering to the authority of law-

enforcing agents, predominantly white.

2. INDIANS - THE EXOTICA: Two major series dominated the representation of Asians during the year - The Far Pavilions (CH4) and The Jewel in the Crown (ITV). Both series were set in India and reconstruct for British audiences in the UK the British colonial experience. The majority of characters who appear are white, many Indians being seen as 'atmosphere artistes' to add authenticity to the programme. The Jewel in the Crown has Hari Kumar as an Indian in the role of a journalist, a somewhat vulnerable figure reflecting mixed feelings about his dual Indo-British background.

Open contempt for the Indians is displayed by some British rulers. In a formal dinner conversation in The Far Pavilions, reference is made to "the hash they (Indians) made of running the place before we came in". In the same programme, when the character of Ash speaks of his Hindu/Muslim upbringing, the comment he receives is that it "sounds like the most unsatisfactory upbringing".

3. THE BLACK PUPIL: The Grange Hill series set in a comprehensive school provided most of the information for viewers to construct ideas of black pupils. The series has been widely credited for its inclusion of black pupils. What information was available?

As in the Grange Hill episode of 17th January where black pupils
ticipation

is increased when United Nations is mentioned, race or multi-culturalism was often an issue for black participation. In one programme, a Sikh boy gets a jibe when nit tests are called for in the school. A white pupil questions him as to how he keeps his hair without nits and continuing from this is a comment made by a white pupil about West Indian hair. She said that she thought 'dark and wiry hair' was not liked by nits.

On the few occasions when parents became involved in school situations and the drama was set in domestic situations, it was the homes of white parents that were seen as in 'And Mum Came Too' & 'Grange Hill'.

4. THE BLACK SLAVE: The chauffeur, the orderly, the waiter and nurse all belong to this category - the people who 'service' the white community. The fact that they are only rarely seen providing the same services to the black community emphasises both the race and class differences.

5. THE ANTI-STEREOTYPE: In the family situation comedy 'I Thought You'd Gone', Mr Megarabel arrives at a middle class family residence with the intention of purchasing their boat. He is black, middle aged, smartly attired and articulate. As a magnanimous gesture, he declines to purchase the boat considering that one of the family is living there. If this particular section of the play was to be explained, Mr Megarabel would gain a positive reading

but in the context of the earlier narrative when he is mistaken for a prowler and caught by a policeman and in the 'precedence' set by previous examples of black representation, Mr Megarabel exists as a curious anti-stereotype. Another example of the anti-stereotype is the Maharaja in 'The Irish RM' who astonishes members of the Irish Magistrate's household with his proficiency in English and horse polo. It is not odd that an anti-stereotype exists on ethnocentric values - proficiency in English and western dress for example.

6. THE UNDERWORLD OF BLACKS: Black representatives frequent the thresholds of violence and legality. The example of Ria the pimp in 'The Sweeney', the armed robber in 'The Bill' and the striptease artiste in 'Marlowe' are some of the representatives who help to sustain this stereotype. A black character who attempted to 'use' his unlawful status to gain credibility with the lawful (and white) society by becoming an informer is subjected to handcuffs and abuse (please see next page).

7. THE ABSENCE Programmes which did not represent blacks made their own statements. The absence of blacks in public school situations e.g. 'Secrets' (Jan, romantic sit-coms e.g. 'A Fine Romance', period plays e.g. 'C P Snow's Strangers and Brothers' was more or less consistent. There was also a regularity with which blacks were excluded from plays which seemed to portray what can best be described as a 'British way of life'. Contemporary and non-contemporary examples



still from 'The Gentle Touch'

The following conversation takes place between 'Eskimo' and Sammy after the former has been handcuffed:

S If you want room service uncle, just ring down. What's the matter old son, frightened are you uncle? You're a slag know that, a no-good dirty grass .. I bet you'll do in your brain wondering how I made you eh?

E Who? Who made? You made me all wrong.

are: 'Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady', 'Emmerdale Farm', 'Cockles'. This was continued in many plays centred on family life as 'Grandad' and 'No Place Like Home'.

During the year-long monitoring, no traditional black families were seen. When black characters were seen in the context of a family, either one or both parents were missing as in 'No Problem' where the parents of the West Indian youth were presumed to be in Jamaica.

Children under the age of 12 were rarely seen and black elderly were absent.

SECTION II

MEDIA FORMS

This section attempts to deal with questions as:

- In what forms are black characters presented to us?
- What are the 'preferred' readings of their representation?
- To what extent do the characters reflect 'real' life?
- What myths are created/sustained by the black representation?

DECODING TELEVISION IMAGES: If we begin with the fact that tv is an emittance of electro signals which appear to us as pictures and sound and for which we find meaning, it follows then that the analysis of programmes is also (and not entirely) an analysis of audio and visual cues and our interpretation of these. How do we understand these 'signs'? As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Ferdinand de Saussure was thinking about a 'science of semiology' which "would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them" envisaging linguistics as only a part of the general science of semiology. Charles Sanders Pierce also laid valuable groundwork on this subject by providing a taxonomy of different classes of signs which he regarded as the essential semiological foundation for a subsequent logic and rhetorics. What will interest us in this paper is the iconography (in Pierce's term, not the same as iconic), a simplistic example of which would be one where good cowboys wear white shirts and bad cowboys black

shirts. The simplistic iconography of villains and heroes/heroines operates on a more complex set of values in today's television drama. For example, the presence of a black chauffeur in 'Barriers' (BBC2) typically symbolises white affluence but can also connote a peculiar 'prestige' which when in the context of the colonial history makes the presence of a black chauffeur in a white household somewhat 'higher status' than a white chauffeur.

We have already examined the empirical evidence pointing to the restricted framework in which black characters are presented to the viewers. Black characters are repeatedly denoted in marginal and subversive roles, the connotations being on the negative side. Even exempting the connotations, a black face on the screen does not merely signify 'a black face' but 'here is a black face'. This carries with it more than a purely lexical explanation. In *The Gentle Touch* (ITV 27th July 1984), the shots of the black boy walking through Covent Garden in the context of the affluent white woman and the police detective genre invariably predict for the audience a violent situation. The accosting and mugging that follows is based on a sequence of events that the audience, through familiar conventions, is led to believe would happen. When the camera moves to a direct shot, it intensifies the sense of shock felt by the woman, thereby inviting the audience to identify with her emotions.



still from 'The Gentle Touch'

TELEVISION CODES: 'ASSAULT AND THEFT'

Two boys, one black and one white are involved in an incident of assault and theft on a wealthy white lady in a crowded market street in London. The generic and technical conventions predicted the violence. When the assault does take place, the black boy becomes the dominant performer and a whole series of signs and codes (contrasting dress, skin colour) and syntagms ('purity', 'corruption') begin to read the incident as 'black boy mugs white lady' - the stereotype.

In school series, the presence of black characters in comprehensive schools is presented as an accepted tradition e.g. Grange Hill but the black pupil emerges as a peripheral character with often 'peculiar' or 'hostile' connotations. The main narratives evolve around the white characters except where multi-cultural situations are involved when black characters' participation is increased. The connotations here are that black pupils' contribution is mainly in terms of multi-cultural or race-related issues and as these issues are presented as being controversial both in the media and outside it, the picture of the black pupil is not exempt from these meanings.

The fact that no black pupils appeared in a play based on a school for gifted children further helps to define television's social and intellectual placing of the black pupil and for helping to sustain ethnocentric viewpoints.

In more general programmes too, the narratives dramatised tensions between black and white representatives, the situation being dealt with as a conflict that is superficially 'resolved'. In 'The Hope and the Glory', Sam and Joe are 'good working-class mates' on a night out to a club when they are faced by racist regulations. Sam being refused a drink has the effect of numbing their friendship, Sam becoming more withdrawn than he was. The narrative disruption that took place and the lack of subversion (Sam or Joe do not effectively challenge racism) point to the strength of the white ideology. In the detective and

police series genre, none of the 'deviants' gain heroic qualities since they are shown to operate on a low efficiency factor, eventually being forced to surrender to white authority.

The imperialist genre was no less responsible in helping to sustain this myth. The white rulers appeared as affluent, power-wielding, unemotional and in control. The picture of the white man or woman riding in comfort against a background of heat, dust and poverty was a recurring one. The black slave stereotype exists much like an automated robot, neither questioning or expressing his/her oppression. The O/S (over-the-shoulder) shot in 'Jewel in the Crown' (please see next page) provides viewers the preferred meanings of white dominance and black servility. Both 'Jewel in the Crown' and 'Far Pavilions' were set around India, produced on a budget far higher than that available to regular television productions. Both help to construct for audiences here ideas about the colonial past. The perspective is that of the white rulers and the Indians appear as seen through the eyes of the white British - as filthy rich or servile, impoverished and poor. The stresses caused by the clash of imperialist ideology on the colonised is characterised by a melodrama of conflicting emotions and group loyalties. The apparent contrast in the Indians own social groupings of rich and poor have connotations of a divided society.



still from 'The Jewel in the Crown'

TELEVISION CODES: 'OFFICER AND ORDERLY'

The high angle O/S (over-the-shoulder) shot conventionally places the subject in a position of powerlessness. It is also a clue as to whose PERSPECTIVE is to be followed. The orderly is holding a shoe which we, the audience, have been told belongs to the officer. The shoe therefore becomes a 'sign' to connote the servility of the orderly. If we add to this the fact that the officer is white and that the situation is set during the British Raj, it clearly establishes for the viewer the colonial ideology and begins to read 'white ruler and black slave'.

REALISM Questions of realism are invariably tied up with complex notions of the connections between television and the audience. To say that television simply reflects life as it exists is no more a credible argument than saying that one says what one feels. In both activities - television recording and speaking - one is employing a sophisticated selection criteria. By selecting particular signs (thereby eliminating others) and upholding these for public view, television can be said to create its own view of reality.

The research has shown that there is a distinct lack of realism in the black representatives. Blacks are not portrayed as they would be in real life as people who care, fall in love, marry, buy food, divorce, fall ill ... all the activities in which white representatives are seen. In a survey by the Commission of Racial Equality, to the question of 'Do 'coloured' roles reflect society?', 54% of producers agreed with the statement that it reinforced myths and only 16% felt that roles did reflect society.

While stereotypes pose a particular kind of limitation, tokenism, which places a single black in a majority white situation, poses other limitations. As in 'Murphy's Mob', the black character has no opportunity to interact with other black characters and his/her identity is one of having 'assimilated' with the group. For the producers and the audience tokenism can have the appearance of multiculturalism.

Examining the use of language can provide useful insights into the meanings associated with black appearances. For example, Comedy programmes were seen to make constant use of racial humour. In the children's pantomime, Aladdin and The Forty Thieves (BBC1), a black actress played Genie of the Ring, a role with positive connotations but the script by John Morley is interspersed with racial humour. "Allah be praised Black Magic!" says one of the characters on the appearance of the black Genie of the Ring. Later, the name 'Abanazar' is twice confused with 'a banana'. Comedy appears to be licence for racial ridicule and for perpetuating racial myths. In 'The Rising Damp' (ITV), Alan and Philip are two young men who share a bedsit. Philip is black and more confident but his sexual behaviour is the subject of jokes: "you don't have time (to read sex magazines) you're too busy doing it." The stereotyped image of the black man's unquestionable virility is given credence in: "you've got 10 wives, no one can question your experience".

Placing several black characters in comedy, detective and police series makes it all the more difficult for the audience to make rational judgements of blacks in general. The absence of positive role models can be said to have a 'negative socialisation' function as far as the young black audiences are concerned. In 'Popular TV and School Children' (DES April 1983), a group of teachers

concluded: "there was distinct under-representation in the ..programmes we studied, with too few positive and realistic images of (ethnic minorities) made available. There was little suggestion of the part they were playing, or might play in contemporary society; and such treatment as there was in selected programmes tended to re-inforce stereotypes, or link members of these groups to a problem. In giving insufficient coverage to these groups, television is not only giving a distorted view of the society in which it operates; it is also missing opportunities to provide a richer, more varied coverage of human experience.."

The relationship between television and its effects is not very clear. The 'stimulus-response' theory, uses and gratifications theory, the social construction theory, the modelling theory.. each place different emphasis on the question of 'effects'. It is however widely held as by McQuail that "the provision of a consistent picture of the social world.. may lead the audience to adopt this version of reality, a reality of 'facts' and of norms, values and expectations.. we can expect certain values to be selectively re-inforced.. we can also expect the mass media to give an order of importance and structure to the world they portray..whether fictionally or as actuality..there is the trust with which media are often held as a sources of impressions about the world outside direct experience" (McQuail, D 'Mass Communication and Society' Open

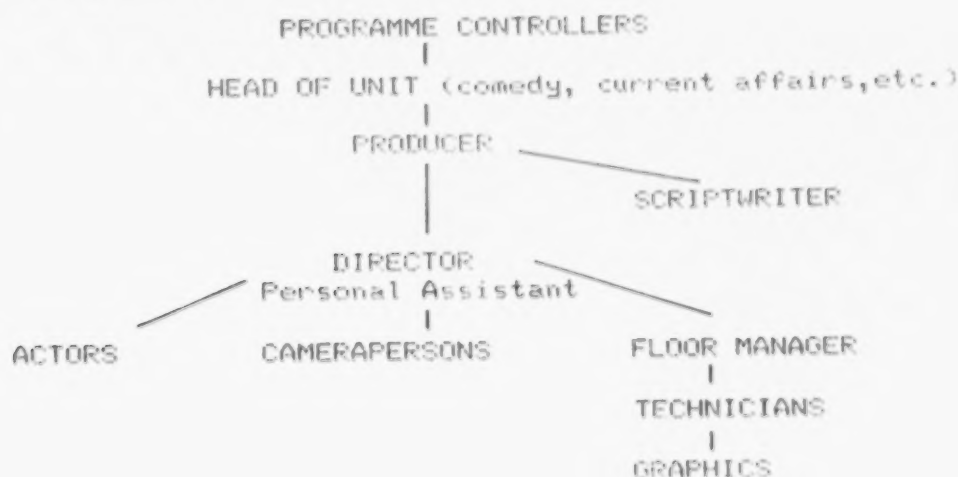
University, 1977 p.81)

If television provides viewers with information and ideas about the world we live in then the information and ideas about black people is particularly limited and misleading.

SECTION III MEDIA PROCESSES

Broadcasting institutions operate with organisational constraints. The BBC alone employs over 30,000 staff (tv and radio) in various parts of the country. It is therefore important to examine how the people within such an organisation perceive their role and how decisions are made regarding the way in which blacks are represented. The television producer within such an organisation can enjoy considerable powers. Stuart Hood writes of the producer in the BBC: "On him (!) rests the final judgement of what is right and seemly to present to his audience .. what they are based on can best be described as programme ethos - a general view of what is fitting and seemly admissable and not admissable."

Typically, an hierarchical structure operates in relation to programme production:



Although it is presumed that black people can be involved at various stages of production, in reality this is rare. In the 1984 BBC appointments 1045 candidates of British origin were interviewed for television production jobs against 21 of Asian and Afro-Caribbean background. Of the 21, only 5 were selected (ABSTRACT Dec 1984/Jan1985). So the black actors are more likely to find themselves working in an all-white production team. The dynamics of the situation cannot be ignored.

I have selected two producers - Charlie Hanson (CH4) and Michael Waring(BBC), both of who have produced plays involving a number of black actors. The two other people who were approached but declined to give an interview were: Phil Redmond and Farukh Dhondy the Commissioning editor for Multi-Cultural Programmes - Ch4. The interviews have been edited, I hope without any alteration of the intended meaning.

INTERVIEWS WITH PRODUCERS : CHARLIE HANSON

Can you tell me something about how 'No Problem' was conceived and produced?

The initial conception of it came from London Weekend from the Head of Comedy at London Weekend who wanted to get on tv a situation comedy which showed black characters and

possibly a mixed cast to a young London audience. It was something they had talked about a lot here but he had been to see some of the theatre productions of the Black Theatre Co-operative over a number of years and it occurred to him that if he approached the Black Theatre Co-operative as a company - a group of actors with the writers and working as a team - and gave them the opportunity to present him with ideas for a situation comedy, that might do the trick because the theatre work was appealing to a young black and white audience in London. So London Weekend Television financed the BTC of which I was a Director to do a 4-week workshop to devise ideas for a situation comedy. There are 8 actors, the 2 writers - Mustapha and Farukh Dhondy, and myself and we worked for 4 weeks trying out different situations for a sit com. At the end of 3 weeks we had a collection of ideas and finally it was narrowed down to the idea of 'No Problem' - of a family whose parents had gone home. It came to that idea partly because there is a long running potential in a family, we found ourselves doing exactly what we thought we would never do because we could see that it had more potential than actually having a situation comedy in a restaurant where the actual setting became more important than the characters. LWT then commissioned a script ... we recorded the pilot and that was successful so we went on to do the series.

Q: So the idea of a sit-com was decided before-hand?

A: Yes, it had to be a sit-com because we were commissioned by the Head of comedy.

Q: You have a full black cast. How do you feel as a white producer?

A: It doesn't really affect me. It is a question I am always asked because before I did this I was working with the BTC in the theatre. I used to say people do Irish plays, American plays and provided you are truthful to that particular medium and if people who are acting and the writers know what they are talking about - as long as they remain faithful to that, then I don't see any obstacles in having a white producer do the job.

We have talked about it many times - we don't know any black producers in entertainment in this country. There is far more actors that you see on screens - behind the cameras, there is far less black faces.

Q: Tell me something about the 'story' of 'No Problem'.

A: It was devised from improvisations. The concept was to have a family without their parents because we wanted it to appeal to a young audience and we said that if we had a parent-children situation then it would be similar to other things we had done before and the twist for us was to have a group of young people living in the same house and within

one family. We stretched credulity a little bit by having lot of different types - in some cases they have different accents. People find it strange but they are all people you could meet in London even if it is slightly exaggerated that they should all be brothers and sisters. They are all into different types of things but they come together to sort out problems each week. the reason why we called it 'No Problem' was to a certain extent because we wanted to show that we ere going to do a programme - a black progrmme that wasn't dealing with black problems - unemployment, all the usual shows that are portrayed. We wanted to show that there is a group of people living quite happily, having a good life even in Willesden. The basis of it is to show people in fairly comic situations and not necessarily dealing with urban realism.

Q: Terry is unemployed...Angel..she's unemployed too.

A: In the first series, they all had jobs, tasks that they did - like Tosh had his pirate radio and he also worked for the hospital radio. The first episode of this series was in the dole queue. That was really to try to bring it back to reality because everybody said how come these people have all got lots of money and they never seem to be doing anything. So we actually set one episode to show that yes, they do have to face up to the problem and they do have to sign on like a lot of other people but we haven't dwelt on that.

Q: I would like to quote a piece from the script. It is the scene with the Asian shop-keeper who says: "why don't you buy my cash and carry offer. You never buy Golden Virgin eh? You don't like Virgin? (smiles at daughter) (studio laughter)" Do you feel that humour, especially racial humour is somewhat cathartic and that therefore any racial slurs are allowed?

A: .. In the first series, there were no Asian characters at all and people were saying you were doing a black series but it is all black/people - no Asians.. I'm sure Farukh had his mind on satirising certain elements of the stereotypical Asian daughter relationship which may offend some people. I think certainly the joke 'golden virgin' was in bad taste and we decided we wouldn't have jokes like that.

Q: A black person watching tv is shown views of black people that are very often on the negative side. Do you feel that 'No Problem' affirms those negative connotations?

A: I think it has a different effect on different audiences. I think on a white audience who don't live in an area like London who watch 'No Problem'.. they are surprised at seeing so many diverse black characters. I think a black audience is more critical in the sense that

they look to it as 'Is this what we are like, is this what we do?' When they are looking for realism, they will not like certain things in it.

Q: Could I ask for your views on integrated casting?

A: That I would say is the ideal. Most black actors would prefer to be integrated. I work with the BTC which is almost the opposite of integrated casting because we are saying we will have a theatre company for black actors in order to give those people more work...I believe people have used the excuse of there are not enough good black actors in the past, certainly producers and directors have said that and the only way they are going to be convinced otherwise is by seeing a lot of good talent on the tv screens.

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL WARING - Producer of 'King'

A: 'King' was I suppose not a particularly typical piece, even in terms of thinking about a play with a black theme because how it came about is all tied up with the fact that I was doing a season of Plays for Today and in my view and in the way I work, it has always been to do with debating with the writers, I don't very often say 'right, I want a play about a black family', it doesn't really work that way. To the extent to which there was any sort of executive

decision about doing that play, I did actually talk to two or three black writers, one of whom was Michael Adamson who wrote a script which in the end I couldn't really afford to do. That was a play about a West Indian confidence trickster. At the same time I was talking to Barry Keefe about whether he would like to write a play again for BBC and we started off talking about a different play altogether. It was a play with an Irish theme and he rang me up afterwards and said 'this play simply isn't working but I have got an idea' which turned out to be 'King'. Now Barry's a white writer but he's more sort of working class writer. That's what he tends to write about and when he said he wanted to write a play about the experiences of the first generation West Indian immigrants, I sort of raised my eyebrows, but I said well, if you think you can write it, please do so.

I thought it was a very very powerful piece of writing when it came to me and it seemed to me to be very interesting in the sense that it had a loosely classical theme on one hand and actually complied with a sort of general social, psychological reality as well.

Q: Did you find casting difficult?

A: The casting is actually much easier with the younger generation than it is with the older generation and that is simply the function.

Q:Does it apply to both black and white actors?

A:I think it applies particularly to blacks. It is because the younger generation have been through the schools and acting is one of the ways out of it - out of one's background - I can't say the ghetto. It is really when writers started to write about working class experience - where were the actors to play? So the actors were actually generated by the writers and I think that's really the best way it will happen for ethnic writing as well, it is if the really good writing comes along. Somehow or the other we will find the actors but of course they are coming into the business more and more and it isn't that difficult to cast accurately I would say upto the age of 35. ; If you think about coming or going into the theatre or tv 15 years ago, there clearly wasn't the work or the demand then. There are various things that make it more possible now - it is both writing and the fact that black Equity are quite strong about integrated casting where possible.

Q:You say the play originated with the writer. Does that mean you had total freedom in the way you interpreted it - were there outside constraints?

A:The main constraint in an area like a single play is always financial rather than thematic. Producers take a

view about what a Play for Today should be - something about the representation of contemporary realities. To that extent one is forced to think about the many audiences.

Q: It was more or less an all black cast. You didn't find any problems with that?

A: I think the only problem in a sense is one's own awareness that one is treading on an experience one doesn't have direct experience of but on the other hand drama has always been like that.

Q: Some producers have said that it is particularly difficult working with black actors.

A: Yes, I know from other experiences but in this particular programme that wasn't the case

Q: Let me come to the question of stereotypes because that interested me somewhat. 'King' is cast as a retired train driver. Did you at any time feel that this may be a stereotypical role and that it may limit your production in any way?

A: How I thought about that really was that the stereotyped occupation was part of the interaction that was taking place. It actually said on the one hand that this is in

general terms an almost recognisable stereotype but on the other hand that it presented a completely subtle individual human being ... If you look at something like Coronation Street, people are pushed into an assumption of a general overview of working class life in Britain - actually I think it is familiar situations, instantly recognisable situations used all the time and they are stereotypes. It depends on what you do with it from now on. The important thing always is an ease of identification from the audience particularly during the early part of the play .. and then I think you've earned the freedom to take the story into unusual directions if you want to.

Q: This theme about familiarity: looking at 1984, you very rarely saw the black family... Did it bother you that the picture of an aggressive black family may lead to generalisations that all black families were aggressive?

A: It didn't really bother me for this reason that I did what the play tried to do which was to use the generation conflict and to an extent you can argue that it is stereotypical. On the other hand, generations from time immemorial do always seem to have quarrelled with each other. At the end of the play, what the play was actually saying was a notion of what England meant to two generations of black people from the West Indies. This is why, just to go back to why he's cast as a train driver, I mean the awful truth is that the London Transport directly recruited in

the West Indies in the early 50s...A lot of people would have known that is how the black family came to be in Britain.

Q: What were the viewers' response?

A: I don't know. I know what the random sample was and that was very mixed. It was greatly enjoyed I think by the people to whom it was directly aimed. I had quite a few letters which is one sort of wavelength. It did not have a huge audience ...I think it had about 4 million viewers but then it was up against some very attractive film on ITV.

Q: Do you think that when you present a black person on the screen you begin to say something political?

A: Not directly. It depends on what the play is about. I think what one is aware of is that one is up against a prejudice all the time really... I think there is in the media a terror if you like of anything in a sense that could make the situation worse.

Q: Would you find something different just casting a black person as one of the actors and not simply because they happen to be black?

A: I think it is to do with notions of reality. I think what inhibits casting in a lot of professional roles is making some point about this character being an

individualist, highly competitive person - you sometimes get that casting - the black policemen, or black lawyer. One makes a point about how unusual it is for a black person from that community. It is as if you had to build in this unusualness, this undoubtedly is that white-black assumption. But suspending disbelief is always in terms of drama.

SECTION IV

A U D I E N C E S

The 'hypodermic theory' of communication which was popular in some analysis of 'audience effects' is limited in the explanations it can provide to the complexity of the communication process because at different times, the audience is capable of adopting and frequently does adopt different and non-passive roles and also because media experiences can be used in quite different ways depending on the credibility of the communicator, the personality of the viewer, the context of the viewing for example. The audience does also articulate, within strict boundaries, what it wants out of television. A more militant example is when in July 1971, members of the Welsh National Society climbed up BBC's 520foot television mast at Blaenplwyf, near Abersystwyth to protest against the lack of Welsh programmes.

The 'mass' theory which was in use even before 1950s was also to some extent responsible for the theory of 'minority culture' which is now an institutionalised concept. Since it is with the representation of the so-called 'minority' culture that this research has concerned itself with, I have shifted the frame of reference to some extent by concentrating the audience survey on the black viewers.

The audience survey was carried out in April 1985 by Public

Attitude Surveys. The aim of the survey was to gauge the response of black audiences to questions related to the representation of black characters on television drama. A total of 510 interviews were held in 9 major towns in UK namely Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, Cardiff, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, London and Manchester. Table 1 overleaf lists the classification of the respondents. A balance was sought in the male/female ratio resulting in 248 of the respondents being male and 262 being female. The ethnic background of the respondents was classified into African, African Asian, Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani to relate to the research's use of the term. The weight of tv viewing was also identified among the respondents which showed the highest percentage (44%) viewing 1- 3 hours of tv a day.

Each respondent was presented with a card which contained names of 13 drama programmes broadcast during 1984 which had attracted regular large audiences of around 10 million or more. They were invited to respond to whether they had viewed any of the programmes which were:

BERGERAC
CORONATION STREET
CROSSROADS
DUTY FREE
EMMERDALE FARM
HI DE HI

PAS 11354 : TV PROGRAMME SURVEY

TABLE 1.

COL %

CLASSIFICATION

BASE: NO. INTERVIEWED

	SEX OF RESPONDENT					AGE OF RESPONDENT		OCCUPATION. GROUPING		ETHNIC BACKGROUND			AREA		WEIGHT OF TV VIEWING			
	TOTAL	MALE	FE- MALE	18-24	25-44	45+	ABC1	C2DE	AFR./ AFR. ASIAN	CARI- BBEAN	IND. SUB-C	LON- DON	OTHER AREAS	ALL HOURS A DAY	NEVER - 3 HOURS A DAY	3 - 6 HOURS A DAY	6 OR MORE HOURS A DAY	
	510	248	262	110	206	194	93	417	35	153	322	110	400	295	169	46		
TOTAL																		
ETHNIC BACKGROUND																		
AFRICAN	18 4%	8 3%	10 4%	3 3%	7 3%	8 4%	4 4%	14 3%	18 51%	0 -	0 -	3 3%	15 4%	8 3%	7 4%	3 7%		
AFRICAN ASIAN	17 3%	7 3%	10 4%	4 4%	10 5%	3 2%	8 9%	9 2%	17 49%	0 -	0 -	4 4%	13 3%	12 4%	5 3%	0 -		
CARIBBEAN	153 30%	73 29%	80 31%	36 33%	48 23%	69 36%	28 30%	125 30%	0 -	153 100%	0 -	46 42%	107 27%	71 24%	62 37%	20 43%		
BANGLADESHI	17 3%	4 2%	13 5%	1 1%	9 4%	7 4%	2 2%	15 4%	0 -	0 -	17 5%	7 6%	10 3%	12 4%	4 2%	1 2%		
INDIAN	184 36%	93 38%	91 35%	49 45%	80 39%	55 28%	38 41%	146 35%	0 -	0 -	184 57%	31 28%	153 38%	113 38%	57 34%	14 30%		
PAKISTANI	121 24%	63 25%	58 22%	17 15%	52 25%	52 27%	13 14%	108 26%	0 -	0 -	121 38%	19 17%	102 26%	79 27%	34 20%	8 17%		

IN LOVING MEMORY
 JULIET BRAVO
 MINDER
 PORRIDGE
 THE PROFESSIONALS
 SHROUD FOR A NIGHTINGALE
 TENKO

The results from this reveal the most widely watched programmes among the black viewers from programmes of high general viewership:

CORONATION STREET	60%
MINDER	59%
THE PROFESSIONALS	57%
CROSSROADS	56%

Coronation Street and Crossroads both belong to the soap opera genre, Minder and The Professionals to the detective genre. All programmes have a fairly constant core of characters around whom new ones are introduced, the detective series to a greater extent. The least viewed in the list provided was the comedy series 'In Loving Memory' attracting only a 6% viewing.

To examine possible links between the viewing of programmes and viewers' ideas of the presence of black characters on the programmes, respondents were asked whether black actors/actresses were seen in the selected programmes. The highest figures recorded were for Crossroads 64% saying

they had seen black characters in the programme, followed by 47% for Minder, 44% for Coronation Street, 43% for Tenko and 42% for The Professionals.

It is significant that the four programmes of highest viewing are also on the list of five programmes with highest perceived presence of blacks. If the presence of blacks alone was to account for the popularity of the programmes, it does not explain why Tenko was relatively low in audience viewing. It may be because the four other programmes have a longer established tradition, or that Tenko is more 'female orientated' or that it has a more 'constructed documentary' approach.

We then went on to establish how far the black audiences were satisfied with the portrayal of black people on television drama. Only 6% expressed complete satisfaction while 31% said they were fairly satisfied and 27% 'not very satisfied'. 10% expressed complete dissatisfaction and 13% had no reply. This was followed by a prompted question for respondents not very satisfied or completely dissatisfied. The percentage of respondents who agreed with the statements are given below:

There are not enough black people in tv drama
59%

Black actors never play leading roles
41%

They fail to get over what black people are really like

39%

TV drama nearly always show black people in a bad light

39%

Black actors nearly always play the same sort of
character

35%

The whole sample was then asked whether they wished to see more black people featured more frequently in tv drama. 66% answered 'yes, more frequently', 6% said 'no - not more frequently, and there was 12% don't know. This was a significant majority confirming the feeling expressed by the producer interviews and by media pressure groups. There was also a high degree of consensus on the question of integrated casting with 63% of the respondents in favour of this type of casting.

SECTION V

C O N C L U S I O N S

In this section I will outline some of the main findings of the research and attempt to make connections between the different sections in the context of the social situation in Britain.

The main findings from the content analysis were:

- Black characters on cast were under-represented in tv drama. From 670 programmes monitored which employed approximately 8700 actors, only 200 were black i.e. 2.3%.
- Black characters were generally portrayed in stereotypical roles as garage worker, nurses, school pupils, subversives or as exotic and rich.
- In the majority of programmes which featured blacks, black characters appeared in fringe and marginal roles.
- A number of programmes showed black characters as violent, aggressive, hostile or 'mixed up'.
- Black characters were rarely seen to engage in caring relationships with each other.
- No complete 'traditional' black family was seen
- Black children under the age of 12 were nearly absent.
- None of the programmes monitored featured the black elderly.
- Black actors continued to play roles cast for blacks and there were few signs of integrated casting
- White actors were still shown to be 'blackened up' for

roles e.g. Michael Bates as Rangi Ram in 'It Ain't Half Hot Mum'

- Some challenging roles for black characters were played by whites e.g. the role of Princess Anjuli is played by Amy Irving in 'The Far Pavilions'.
- Contemporary roles for blacks commanding respect and authority were absent except in occasional 'fringe' roles.
- No black characters emerged with 'heroic' qualities.

These facts alone must be disturbing reading for anyone concerned with broadcasting. In portraying blacks in minor and incidental roles and in roles which exhibit a pattern of negative connotations, television can be said to be making a clear political statement - that blacks belong to the fringe and have little of importance to say.

The interviews with producers adds interesting dimensions to the content analysis findings. Hanson openly admits that he did not want to present 'wholesome' 'rounded' characters. As a producer, he is certainly allowed to exercise such decisions. But it leaves one puzzling because other programme producers also seem to feel that way - not about everyone, but about black people generally. The obvious result would be drama without 'rounded' and 'wholesome' black characters - a limitation to drama surely? So there appears to be an intrinsic distortion in the way black characters are perceived.

The intention of the producers are as relevant and Hanson is well aware of the complexities of his role especially of the (presumed) contradictory demands from his audience. But the stress on form rather than content betrays an unease in the production values.

The interview with Waring also provides interesting dimensions. There is a sense in which blacks are regarded as belonging to a working class culture. Waring accepts the fact that a white man from a working class background can write a 'powerful' drama about the black working class. One asks: Does television accept a black writer who writes a 'powerful' drama about a white family? A whole set of assumptions and expectations can be said to be in operation where the involvement of blacks is concerned. Waring revealed to some extent the tensions he feels as a producer - of Black Equity (a section of the actors' union) of displeasing audiences, of being on new ground. He is however not so concerned with audience figures and can rely on the established 'Play for Today' audiences unlike 'No Problem' where audience figures appeared to matter more forcing a strange situation of minority programming for the majority.

Both producers interviewed were the ones challenged enough to deal with drama representing blacks with major roles in the cast. The majority of television especially programmes depicting what is considered to be a 'British' or 'non

working-class' way of life e.g. 'Emmerdale Farm', 'Diana', 'Just Good Friends', 'Winter Sunlight' did not represent black characters. Period plays were particularly prone towards excluding blacks, a contradiction of historical facts.

What appear to be the guiding criteria for decisions regarding black representation? Certainly, a certain amount of what Stuart Hood has termed 'programme ethos' exists - "a general view of what is fitting and seemly, admissible and not admissible". The problem with this is that when blacks are under or misrepresented or both, it almost becomes a licence for further justifying such an ethos. Only a radical break with dominant ideology can allow a more progressive form of television.

Another criteria is to do with the audience. Minority programming, it is largely assumed will have minority appeal and in this sense there is an attempt to group minorities together (e.g. Asians and West Indians) as in 'No Problem'. Or there is the situation where juxtapositioning the lifestyles of black and white characters is considered to attract both audiences as in 'The Jewel in the Crown'. A number of producers however are isolated and considering that their contact is with colleagues, casting agencies, theatre groups and other organisations which are predominately white, it makes for a dangerously closed system. A producer who may wish to move

out of this insulated framework does not appear to have the level of advice and support necessary within the organisation. The audience survey shows that blacks are generally satisfied with television drama but there is also a strong plea for more black characters on tv drama.

The implications for equal opportunities in Britain is an issue on which the black community has shown both anger and resentment. Many black people feel that the mainstream 'agencies' are not able to take any action against their under- and misrepresentation in the media and there has been an attempt by black groups to organise themselves independently. CEQA - the Campaign for Equal Opportunity in the Arts, is one example. It was started in 1982 as a pressure group by a group of Equity members disillusioned with what was being offered to Afro/Asian actors - this, despite the fact that Equity had an Afro-Asian Committee. Its then Chair Jimi Rand stated: "The fact that we are rarely seen, rarely featured, other than as tokens or stereotypes is a statement of political attitude....When the producer of a well known British soap opera goes on record stating that he will not have blacks in the show because viewers will switch off, it is abundantly clear that equal opportunity is being denied to a whole section of our society." Media pressure groups and trade union groups are also being forced to consider the under-employment of blacks in front of and behind the screens.

Integrated casting (casting based on ability, not colour) is an area where black actors are having to challenge deeply held conventional ideas and this extends to theatre and film. Only a minority of producers support it in practice. David Porter, Producer for Lyric Theatre said on a BBC Ebony programme of December 1983: "There are a lot of myths about this. One is that there are not enough good black actors, that's the main one that's thrown at us.. There is a feeling which I think is totally unfounded that the audience won't accept that there is a black actor on the stage playing a non-black part. I think if you set up any sort of convention in the theatre, people playing horses for example, the audience will accept it and go along with it and very much enjoy it."

With the absence of positive images of blacks in society in general, many blacks especially in education argue that television has a social responsibility for providing these images. Positive role models are a necessary part of the socialising process. For a black child, not to see a black family at all on the screen is an alienation process. For a white child, it confirms his or her ignorance fostering prejudice about the quality of life that blacks lead.

Questions of race and black representation are sensitive issues and although television that exists purely to

service different sections of the community would be limiting in its function, television that fails to take into account the experiences of groups, especially blacks, or provides negative and limited perceptions of these groups - this kind of television is more oppressive in its function. A minority that is already oppressed in society will not tolerate this situation for too long. The benefits of change will not benefit the minorities alone. The policy of minority programming fails simply because this has not been understood. Sensitive minority programming and the introduction of integrated casting is as beneficial to the minorities as the majorities. In an area as drama, tremendous artistic freedom exists for exploring new ways of presenting situations, people, relationships. If power continues to be vested in people who only see drama from a particular, ethnocentric viewpoint, this restricts the diversity of dramatic expression. Eventually one is talking about sharing the power structures of the media to allow plurality and diverse representations of black and other under and misrepresented participants of the media.